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TAGS: [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: ISAF COMMANDER MCNEILL PRAISES ALLIED UNITY,  
HIGHLIGHTS REMAINING CHALLENGES IN HIS FAREWELL ADDRESS

Classified By: Ambassador Victoria Nuland, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Former COMISAF General Dan K. McNeill, who turned over ISAF command to General David McKiernan on June 3, commended Allied unity and investment in Afghanistan during his June 4 farewell address to the NAC and ISAF Partners. Nevertheless, he reminded Allies that NATO's failure to fill ISAF's force requirements prolong the mission, and that political support for ISAF both in contributing nations and in Afghanistan could not be counted on indefinitely. McNeill cited a 50 percent increase in insurgent attacks in RC-East in April, and stated that analysis shows a link between increased violence in Afghanistan and deals with militants in Pakistan. He called for NATO to have "unrelenting political dialogue" with the Pakistani government on the problem of militant sanctuaries in their border regions. He urged a frank discussion by the NAC on ISAF's role in counternarcotics, and suggested an expansion of ISAF's role to allow better support for Afghan eradication forces and expanded interdiction. In a comment that garnered close attention from Norway, Italy, and others, General McNeill suggested an examination of whether NATO's PRTs should transition to Afghan leadership with international support sooner rather than later. In response to questions from Poland and Jordan about the role of Iran, McNeill noted that weapons continue to flow from Iran although it is hard for ISAF to judge the extent given ISAF's light presence in the West and complete lack of presence in Nimroz province. In response to questions from several nations, McNeill urged Allies to be ready to surge resources to support upcoming elections, as NATO did in 2004-2005. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In his June 4 farewell address to the NAC and ISAF partners, outgoing COMISAF McNeill praised the individual soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines of each contributing nation. McNeill recalled the dire predictions in the press

at the time he took command of ISAF in February '07 about a fraying Alliance and Taliban "offensives," neither of which occurred. Rather than fraying, the Alliance had increased ISAF force levels and capabilities, General McNeill said in commending overall Allied unity. He assured PermReps that ISAF has the initiative, and is a credible force on the battlefield. He urged Allies and Partners to remain steadfast in their commitment to the mission, while he acknowledged the ups and downs of debates in the legislatures of all contributing nations. He told PermReps it was no secret that ISAF needed more forces. He reinforced the message delivered to NAC repeatedly by the Secretary General, Chairman of the Military Committee, and SACEUR, that while ISAF will not fail given current force levels, it will take longer for an under-resourced ISAF to complete its mission. General McNeill cited the strategic danger of this timeframe exceeding that of the perishable political will in Afghanistan and on the domestic front in all ISAF contributing nations.

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Pakistan: Problems with Sanctuaries, and an Uncertain Pakmil  
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¶3. (S) General McNeill stressed that taming the insurgency in Afghanistan, and bringing long-term stability, will prove to be elusive so long as insurgent sanctuaries that enable the recruitment, training, and refitting of forces remain in Pakistan. He cited a 50 percent increase in insurgent

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attacks in RC-E in April, and stated that analysis shows a link between this increased violence in Afghanistan and decreased Pakistani security operations stemming from political negotiations with militants in Pakistan. This lack of pressure on the Pakistani side of the border - underscored by the recent press conference of Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud ("the most dangerous insurgent," according to McNeill) in which he announced his intentions to fight in Afghanistan -- undermined the solid counterinsurgency operations conceived and led out by the United States and implemented by Poland (and soon, France) as well in the east.

General McNeill shared his observation that the Pakistani government has been less keen on dialogue with Afghanistan and ISAF in the past sixty days than at any prior time in his tenure as COMISAF. Citing a dysfunctional Pakistani government, he urged an "unrelenting" political dialogue in order to get Pakistan to come to terms with the extent of the problem, and tackle it effectively.

¶4. (S) Canada, Germany, Romania, Turkey, and the UK asked General McNeill about the utility of the Tripartite Commission (TPC) as a means of addressing border challenges. (Comment: Canada has been outspoken at NATO for adding a political element to the TPC, and the Pakistani cancellation of the last three high-level TPC meetings has alarmed some Allies. End comment.) McNeill acknowledged that Pakistani commitment to the TPC has been problematic of late, but urged Allies not to overlook the fact that although several high-level meetings had been cancelled, the work of all the preparatory groups has continued, and the commanders of RC-East and RC-South meet regularly with Pakistani counterparts. While expressing confidence in Pakistani Army Chief of Staff Kayani, he shared an observation based on talks with him that Kayani is waiting for the political confusion in Islamabad to clear up before making any decisive moves on operations in the border regions and devoting part of the Army's force structure from traditional defense roles to counterinsurgency work.

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Counternarcotics: "When I See Poppies, I See the Insurgency"  
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¶5. (C) The challenge extends beyond sanctuaries, General McNeill stated, asserting that narcotics pose a greater

challenge in RC-South than does the insurgency, and that "20 to 40 percent" of insurgent funding comes from the drug business. He commented that when he sees a field of poppy, he sees the Kalashnikovs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that the poppy will fund. McNeill told the NAC that ISAF was doing all it could at present to tackle narcotics under the bounds of the present OPLAN, and encouraged a robust debate in the NAC as to whether ISAF's mandate should be expanded to increase its provision of force protection for Afghan-led eradication and permit direct action by ISAF force against drug labs, storage areas, precursor chemicals, and key high-value traffickers linked to the insurgency. He was careful to clarify that he opposed the conduct of eradication operations by ISAF, and that ISAF should only support Afghan forces in eradication. Nor should ISAF blur the lines between policing and the conduct of military operations - ISAF is a military operation, he stated. General McNeill made clear, though, that the Afghan government must also take a stronger stand and do more. He asked why President Karzai or another high-level Afghan official had not yet made a clear statement that the government will not tolerate illegal

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poppy cultivation any longer. Germany and France expressed caution on expanding ISAF's counter narcotics role, citing the crucial role for Afghan leadership, and suggesting that the development of the ANA could lead to stronger Afghan gains against narcotics.

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Pushing the Afghans to Do More  
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¶6. (C) General McNeill praised progress made in the training of the Afghan National Army and Police under COM CSTC-A MG Cone's leadership, as well as the delivery of development assistance and progress in governance by all ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Noting a tendency of Afghans to turn to the international community to solve complex problems, however, he recommended tough love in order to get the Afghans to perform better. In response to a question from the Dutch PermRep, he stated that at nearly 4,000 ANA recruits monthly now, recruitment is not a problem for Afghan security forces. He then stated that 2011 was a likely date for ANA self sufficiency, but that the ANA would not be fully mature until 2013 when the ANA Air Corps is fully operational. He suggested that it might be useful to set a firm target completion date, in order to put more pressure on the Afghans and get them outside their comfort zone. On PRTs, he expressed the same rationale, recommending debate on how much longer PRTs should remain in Afghanistan as presently configured. He suggested shifting the focus of PRTs away from long-term development projects and infrastructure, and reconfiguring forces to conduct operations that permit the space for that type of development to be delivered by the UN and others, permit governance to develop, and provide quick impact assistance projects.

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Iran  
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¶7. (S) Poland and Jordan asked about Iran's role in Afghanistan, with Poland citing reports of Iranian weapons transfers to specific ethnic groups in western Afghanistan, potentially fomenting ethnic conflicts. General McNeill stated that weaponry originating in Iran has been intercepted by ISAF, and that Iran has been involved particularly in tribal areas near Shindand in western Afghanistan. Noting the limits of ISAF intelligence due to a light force presence overall in RC-West with nothing in Nimroz province, he stated that not everything crossing the border from Iran had a negative impact, but that weapons continue to flow into Afghanistan from Iran, despite the heavy Iranian military presence on the Iranian side of the border that is aimed at preventing the flow of narcotics into Iran.

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Elections - Be Ready to Surge  
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¶8. (C) In response to Canadian and British questions about ISAF's readiness to assist with security for the upcoming 2009/2010 elections, General McNeill reiterated the importance that more people vote in these elections than voted in the 2004/2005 elections, in order to enhance legitimacy. He expressed concern that a feeling of disenfranchisement may discourage some from voting since voting in Afghanistan requires a real effort, often to

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include walking for miles over winding mountainous paths to reach a polling station. He encouraged Allies to keep perspective that although the elections likely will not be perfect and some violence will be seen, they must occur, and they must be a success. Pointing to U.S. leadership and NATO's effort in surging resources to Afghanistan to assist with the 2004/2005 elections, he urged Allies and Partners to begin looking closely at what more they may be able to do for these elections.

¶9. (C) In other interventions, the Secretary General warmly praised General McNeill's service and accomplishments, and presented him with the NATO Meritorious Service Medal. Ambassador Nuland expressed pride on behalf of the United States in General McNeill's service, during which he took ISAF from a mission that did peacekeeping where possible, to a peacemaking force comprising 40 nations from four continents. Spanish PermRep Benavides congratulated General McNeill, dubbing him "General Comprehensive Approach", for his accomplishments in integrating ISAF military operations with civilian reconstruction efforts, a moniker echoed appreciatively by several other PermReps.

¶10. (U) General McNeill did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.  
NULAND